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ABSTRACT

This document describes collaboration by British providers of further and higher education to train workers for employment in rural based industries. After an introduction that reviews the need for such collaboration, the following five sections provide examples and two case studies of collaboration: (1) "Provision of Education and Training for Rurally Based Industries"; (2) "Regional Collaboration"; (3) "Collaboration in the Use of Informational Technology"; (4) "Local Collaboration"; and (5) "Collaboration between Agricultural Colleges and National Agencies." The last section, called "Overlapping Functions," discusses the overlap between education, training, and advising, as the work of educational institutions gradually develops into providing inservice courses, in addition to offering traditional preservice training for younger students. (CML)

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COLLABORATION IN TRAINING AND UPDATING RURAL WORKFORCES

In The Rural Economy: Implications for Further, Higher and Adult Education *(1987), the Further Education Unit (FEU) published proposals on how the further and higher education system should support the rural economy. This is the second in a series of bulletins, endorsed by the FEU Rural Economy Working Group, based on the issues raised in that report. It looks at collaborative provision of further and higher education for those training for or working in rurally based industries.*

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INTRODUCTION

In view of the ever-increasing pace of change in the rural economy, there is a need for more collaboration between the providers of education and training (see *The Rural Economy* paragraphs 76, 77, 82, 95). Better use has to be made of scarce resources (such as expertise and high-cost capital equipment) and this should override boundaries of the organisation, the institution or the territory.

Rural workforces are diverse in character. Some 600,000 people work in agriculture, and an estimated 400,000 work in related industries (*The Case for Agriculture* Craig, G. M., Jollans, J. L. and Korbey, A., 1986). Many rural workforces include large numbers of people working in the energy, water supply, manufacturing, construction and service industries.

It is likely that agriculture will continue to be thinned down and better structured in areas where there is top quality land (*New Opportunities for the Countryside* Countryside Commission, 1987). Arable farming will be further concentrated in the eastern counties and, while there may be a slight decline in the number of livestock, milk and beef production are likely to continue in the western counties, while livestock rearing and forestry will predominate in Wales and the North.

There will probably be an increase in forestry and leisure pursuits in Scotland, Central and North Wales and the Lake District. Parts of South Wales and the south west of England are likely to see environmental conservation becoming far more important as commercial leisure develops in those areas. There is an opportunity to integrate conservation and public recreation with agriculture, and this should produce a modest revenue.

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More small industries are likely to base themselves in the countryside. There is a growing market for tourism and recreation activities as access to land is improved. This will increase the need for countryside interpretation and the management of those visiting rural areas, and hence the training required for wardens, rangers, conservationists and similar groups. In some rural areas labour supplies are increasing, but in other remoter areas the population is still declining.

Unemployment is a severe problem in many rural areas, though it is not always as obvious as it is in towns and cities (*Annual Report of Development Commission*, 1987). Employment in the primary industries has continued to decline, but agriculture is still an important source of work in many counties and, in some cases, accounts for 10–20% of the total labour force (as much as 31.5% in Co. Fermanagh) (Craig, Jollans and Korbey).

For those who have access to employment, an adequate income and good transport facilities, rural life is good; but for a substantial minority life can be very difficult.

PROVISION OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR RURALLY BASED INDUSTRIES

Agencies and establishments offering education, training and advice for agricultural and land-based industries include universities, polytechnics, and agricultural and further education colleges. Also involved are the Ministry of Agriculture via its Training Board and the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service, National Park Study Centres, the Forestry Training Council, the Water Industry Training Association, the Field Studies Council, the Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management and several large commercial organisations.

The Development Commission, through the Rural Development Commission (formerly the Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas (CoSIRA)), provides a range of training for country businesses employing an average of five people. Originally set up to support traditional rural craft workers such as agricultural engineers, blacksmiths, farriers, saddlers, thatchers and potters, the Commission now also covers small manufacturing and service units. It offers training at managerial, supervisory and shop-floor levels and assists with the introduction of computerised systems. It claims some 20,000 active clients employing some 100,000 workers.

Education and training, including updating, of the rural workforces engaged in the energy, manufacturing, construction and service industries has traditionally been undertaken by the industries themselves, complemented by further and higher education and the training boards. As small industries move into the countryside and more service industries base their activities in rural locations, the need for new training networks develops.

REGIONAL COLLABORATION

Falling college rolls and the changing needs of rural learners provide scope for more regional collaboration, both within and between the further and higher education sectors. The educational opportunities available to the rural population have been poor and it is only by ensuring that marketing expertise, information technology and learning resources are effectively co-ordinated that any improvement can be made.

Those who need mid-career updating and retraining are not concerned with the barriers between the further and higher education sectors; they want 'one stop' provision. Initiatives such as the Cranfield Rural Institute (which offers a range of courses from craft / technician to degree and postgraduate levels) could act as regional 'umbrellas' for courses at all levels for land-based and other rural industries.

The benefits of inter-sector collaboration include a more professional approach to marketing (in particular to market research), a wider availability of research and development facilities, a wider use of specialised library resources and information technology, and an improved motivation of staff.

There are already many examples of inter-institutional collaboration within the further education sector (see Case Study 1). These and other inter-sector initiatives show that it is possible to overcome barriers between public sector further and higher education institutions, between authorities, and between LEA institutions and national colleges (grant-aided by the DES). Geographical distance need not be a bar to new arrangements to co-ordinate integrated training arrangements.

CASE STUDY 1: THE NORTHERN COLLEGES OF AGRICULTURE

A three-year sandwich course leading to a BTEC National Diploma in Land Use and Recreation is run jointly by the Northumberland, Cumbria and Durham Colleges of Agriculture. When the Northumberland College approached the other two, together with the National Parks and National Trust organisations, with a view to buying in expertise, it became apparent that students could benefit from spending time in each college. For instance, the Cumbria College is also the National School of Forestry, the Northumberland College has three contrasting farms and is in a strong position to teach the integration of agriculture and conservation, and the Durham College has experience relating to land use and reclamation and the relationship between coal mining and farming where they operate in close proximity to each other.

A planning meeting attended by representatives from 32 organisations was held in September 1984 and a decision to collaborate in a joint venture was made later that year.

After further research into industrial support and employment prospects (for students completing the course from 1989 onwards), a joint submission was made to BTEC early in 1986 and the course commenced in September of that year. The application for approval had written support from around 40 organisations known to be involved in the subject area. This extensive consultation reflects the amount of market research necessary when moving into new areas and training.

An advisory group, representative of about 20 organisations, was formed before the course started and very few problems have since been encountered. To quote from a letter received from the initiating college:

'Even the idea of bringing together representatives of local education authorities passed without too many problems and the fears of county treasurers were largely eased by an agreement that Northumberland should act as an agent for the others for the receipt of student fees. Even now (1988) one county still charges more for residence than the other two. This has caused some difficulties and we invariably have to write separately to each supporting grant authority in order to explain to them what at first sight may be a complicated system.

A number of other organisations are providing us with support in specialist areas, e.g. photography (Carlisle Technical College), fish farming (Barony College, Dumfries), the outward bound element (a group in the Lake District) and coastal services training (Mercantile Training School at Blyth). The Durham College has been guaranteed strong support from two Durham University departments.

It is inevitable that further areas of co-operation will be examined. Although at this stage nothing positive has been agreed, discussions are going on concerning the possibility of sharing a one-year course aimed at young people who might be interested in rural business enterprise. It is also likely that once the main course has settled down in terms of land use and recreation, we will be able to consider supporting various organisations with short service modules, mostly of a sound practical base. I would say finally that most of our enquiries and research have led us to believe that there is a need to provide qualified students at a broad-based practical level whereas the output of graduates for careers with land-based organisations is probably well provided for.'

From a survey of 85 national advertisements over a period of 18 months, the course brochure lists some 13 types of posts in which qualified students can find employment.

COLLABORATION IN THE USE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

THE NATIONAL COMPUTER USERS' GROUP IN AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION (NCUGAE)

NCUGAE was established to co-ordinate relevant developments throughout the country and to provide a communications network for the dissemination of information, expertise and software. Its regional structure allows much of the organisation to be carried out locally, thus avoiding costly central administration.

Around 40 organisations, including university departments of agriculture and the Agricultural Training Board (ATB), are members. The group circulates newsletters and holds regular seminars and conferences on subjects such as data capture, expert systems and interactive techniques in training and education.

A research programme based at the Warwickshire College of Agriculture developed more than 180 software programs for use nationally and a library of software has been established. The five agricultural colleges which received ESG courseware funding during 1987 produced some 24 programs, including new spreadsheets, CAD/CAL and staff development packages.

Over 40 people attended one of the regular series of national seminars at the National Agricultural Centre. The latest developments in Level-3 courseware were demonstrated and discussions produced many ideas for courseware developments in agriculture, horticulture, fisheries and game management.

The Royal Agricultural Society organised a second annual Agricultural Students' Event in 1988 at the National Agricultural Centre and invited NCUGAE to co-ordinate exhibitions of working computer systems from around 20 agricultural colleges.

TTNS

About 17 agricultural colleges use The Times Network System via Telecom Gold. Some LEAs pay a county subscription and expect college staff to use it; others still regard it as a 'hackers' toy'. (The mail facilities alone can justify the subscription!) In the counties which subscribe, there are pilot schemes which send information from colleges to schools on topics such as cow records, field details, farm diary and weather data—of added value when schools visit the college farm.

If the resources of this group were now turned more towards the provision of post-experience and updating courses, colleges would be able to make a significant intervention in this area of work.

LOCAL COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS

Where colleges have established PICKUP Local Collaborative Project (LCP) programmes, they are breaking down the barriers to collaborative provision of training and education.

There is evidence that these services seem distant and austere to those who have not been involved in any post-school educational activities. There is a need for innovation in reaching out to more isolated country areas and there is scope for further collaborative use of new technologies such as audio-visual conference via telephone or satellite.

Some 35 Local Collaborative Projects have been targeted at rural workforces, including agricultural/horticultural, tourism, electronics, plastics and small manufacturing businesses. Two universities, several colleges of FHE and more than 20 agricultural colleges have been or are involved in these initiatives, 12 of which also included the ATB and/or Agricultural Development and Advisory Service (ADAS).

An LCP based at the Lancashire College of Agriculture was established jointly by the college and the Lancashire Forum for Rural Initiatives. It includes collaboration with Lancaster and Morecambe College of Further Education, Cumbria College of Agriculture and Forestry, the ATB and the Local Enterprise Agency, and is looking at the needs of a whole range of small businesses, mostly agricultural. The main emphasis is on retraining in business management, with a focus on bookkeeping and accountancy. The college's input includes formal teaching from 1.00 to 3.00 pm, with an informal workshop/drop-in session from 3.00 to 5.00 pm. A technology bus visited the village of Hornsby every Tuesday during March 1988 in order to bring in, to an area short of IT facilities, the services of the East Lancashire Technical Unit.

A likely outcome will be the formation of a Rural Small Industries Club to assist in identifying educational and training needs. It has been found that conventional chambers of trade are not suitable for the needs of small rural entrepreneurs as they focus more readily on urban rather than rural industries.

COLLABORATION FOR THE UNEMPLOYED

Barriers between the higher, further, community and adult sectors must be removed if the education services are to appeal to those in rural areas. Many agricultural colleges are involved in community education and training programmes with groups of unemployed people. College farms provide a range of livestock, crops and machinery which can offer hands-on experience, an important part of these programmes.

CASE STUDY 2—THE BRATHAY RURAL ENTERPRISE PROJECT

The Brathay Rural Enterprise Project is an experimental project in Cumbria. Its aim is to assist young unemployed people from the rural areas of the county to study the possibilities of self-employment without actually committing themselves to it, and to enhance their personal skills to help them improve their own job prospects or return to full-time education.

Although Cumbria is not, by national standards, an area badly affected by unemployment, there are isolated small towns and villages where the proportion of people out of work is almost as high as in the inner cities. Local development is static, with Vickers of Barrow-in-Furness and Glaxochem in Ulverston providing much of the employment in the Furness Peninsula. Kendal has a number of smaller firms, like Provincial Insurance and K's Shoes, which make it a very prosperous town by the regional standards. Further up the West coast, Sellafield provides much employment. There is a lot of seasonal employment in the Lake District, around Windermere and Ambleside. Unemployment is particularly high around Millom, Milnthorpe and Sedbergh.

The reason for trying the project out in Cumbria stems very largely from Brathay's special position in that county. Brathay had been involved in development training since 1946, and became the accredited training centre for the county in 1984. In 1985 it attempted to make its development training techniques available in an area of high unemployment at Knowsley in Merseyside, where it ran a successful community leadership programme. This is continuing, and has extended to Salford. At the same time, interest in training in rural areas, particularly with the Youth Training Schemes, has been aroused by studies at Dartington and Stoneleigh. Brathay, being a leading organisation in the Development Training field and the accredited centre for one of England's most rural counties, was ideally situated to operate a project such as this.

A number of factors influenced the design of the programme, most notably the wide geographical area covered. Cumbria is about 7,000 square kilometres in area, with the main centres of population scattered around its periphery. Public transport provision varies from poor to non-existent, and traffic is slow on most roads.

The project received funding from the MSC (now the Training Agency) (initially as an Enhanced Voluntary Projects Programme with financial support from the Rank Foundation), the Brathay Hall Trust and the Gold Field's Environment Trust in conjunction with the Amey Roadstone Corporation.

Since April 1986, some 89 trainees have completed training courses of an average length of 10 weeks, comprising development training provided largely by the Brathay Residential Centre for Leadership and Development Training; business skills training provided by Kendal College of Further Education (the Introduction to Business module devised in consultation with the MSC Adult Training Strategy Unit); and outreach work/work experience/work training which takes place as close as possible to trainees' homes.

Back-up support services are provided for trainees after they leave the programme. In addition to the Enterprise Allowance Scheme and agencies like the Small Firms Service and the Rural Development Commission, there are local support groups in different areas of the country. Following approaches to Rotary Clubs in the area, several individuals volunteered their services. These local support groups complement the services of the Rural Development Commission, for example, and the continued counselling of the Brathay staff.

Of the 89 trainees who have completed the courses, 13 are now self-employed, 28 are in employment, 2 are in voluntary work, 13 moved on to college courses and 13 went into MSC training.

As a means of helping unemployed young people in rural areas, the programme has been relatively successful. What is has not done, and probably could not hope to do, is significantly revitalise run-down rural areas. Of the 13 currently self-employed, only two are in a position to employ others.

COLLABORATION BETWEEN AGRICULTURAL COLLEGES AND NATIONAL AGENCIES

COLLEGE/ATB COLLABORATION

Sixteen county agricultural colleges were established between 1896 and 1939, and a further 20 between 1946 and 1967. All have received considerable allocations of capital and investment in staffing. There are, however, significant differences between the provision of smaller and larger colleges, though all provide, to varying degrees, resource bases for the development of education and training for land-based industries.

The ATB was established some 21 years ago, at a time when there was a need to change the attitude of much of industry to training. Considerable attention was given to the joint planning of training and education for the agricultural workforce. The Milroy Committee defined the difference between technical education and technical training (if only for administrative purposes). It made provision for the charging and apportionment of fees (where provision was on a joint basis) and referred to liaison at regional and national level and the rationalisation of course provision. It considered that a national forum should be set up to include representatives of the professional and industrial organisations, ADAS and the ATB.

In 1977 the Consultative Group for Training and Education in Agriculture (CGTEA) was formed. Its objectives were to:

- co-ordinate planning activities which are of mutual concern to the organisations;
- ensure the optimum use of joint resources;
- recommend to the parent organisations the manner in which jointly agreed proposals might be implemented and the degree of priority that should be accorded to them.

While the group has no executive powers and, in most cases, cannot do more than make recommendations, its members are considered to be of sufficient standing to be able to persuade their parent organisations (in the case of the education service—the staff organisations) to give due consideration to its proposals.

A particular achievement of the group was the establishment of a preferred Youth Training Scheme which has been a model for other industries. It also set up a sub-committee to monitor open learning developments in agriculture and land-based industry, made recommendations which led to the establishment of a national validating body for agricultural and related qualifications, and advised on the establishment of links between the Agricultural Education Service, ADAS and the ATB.

At local level the amount of collaboration between the ATB and the Agricultural Education Service varies across the country. There is an established pattern of liaison concerning the Youth Training Scheme and there is usually cross-representation on respective guiding bodies such as college governors and ATB area training committees. In some counties the ATB uses college staff as instructors on training group courses and there have been interesting examples of collaboration in several LCPs.

Discussions with senior staff in the education, training and advisory services suggest that the respective organisations are concerned to define their boundaries of operation as each goes its own way and opportunities for collaboration are lost. The legislation to enable the ATB to provide training (on a commercial basis) outside the agricultural industry is seen by some colleges as a new threat to the courses they are developing for the land-based industries. These concerns about territory can only lead to barriers to the provision of better learning opportunities. These is scope for both competition and collaboration between the two organisations.

COLLEGE/ADAS COLLABORATION

The agricultural industry became used to a system of county and district advisory officers during the 1939-45 war. A new National Agricultural Advisory Service was set up in 1946 (to become ADAS in the 1970s). Before the war, farming advice was based on the university agricultural departments, three national colleges of agriculture (Harper Adams, The Royal and Seale Hayne) and the 16 farm institutes now known as county agricultural colleges. (This system still applies in Scotland.)

When the advisory service was first established, the Ministries of Agriculture and Education published joint circulars which set out the objects of NAAS and the responsibilities of the LEAs regarding the (then) Farm Institutes. *Joint Circular 3/123* specified that staff could interchange teaching with advisory duties but this provision was never implemented.

The ADAS was widely used by farmers and was a potent agent in the success of the industry, which eventually led to over-production. It has been reorganising on a more commercial basis, in line with government policies. The Service has extensive research and development resources which the colleges and ATB rely on for use in their instructional programmes.

The collaboration that takes place between the colleges and ADAS again varies from county to county. ADAS staff assist with instruction at some colleges, colleges provide facilities for crop and animal trials, students visit ADAS demonstration farms, and there are joint promotions of various kinds. However, in the present climate of commercialisation, there is developing competition between the services when it comes to the provision of updating opportunities.

OVERLAPPING FUNCTIONS

There is evidence to suggest (*Updating the Field* FEU, 1987) that members of the agricultural workforce see the education, training and advisory services in their conventional roles of, respectively, teaching pre-experience students, training in farm skills and providing advice in new and existing technology. There is thus a need to market collaborative programmes under new banners.

There is an increasing amount of overlap between the education, training and advisory services as the work of the educational institutions gradually develops into the area of post-experience courses and short courses for the training and retraining of adults. The Further Education Act 1985 encourages educational institutions to offer, commercially, a range of consultancy, development and advisory services. The ATB has also begun to provide training for non-agricultural activities related to the rural economy. The ADAS increasingly offers specialist advice and development to individuals and groups on a commercial basis.

With the increasing overlap of function, it is most important that there should be full co-operation in order to avoid duplication of provision. Benefits can accrue to all participating providers in collaborative projects. The credibility of each can be strengthened under the reinforcing influence of a joint approach.

ADAS supplies and markets information on new technical developments, the ATB provides skills training, and the colleges have the strength of the resource base, both physical and human. This can be effectively used by the other agencies through planned collaboration and co-operation and by sharing the costs, income and benefits. It is only in this way that the rural industry will identify the resources available and benefit from their use.

ADAS and the ATB have well-developed farmers' groups. Colleges should collaborate more in servicing the groups.

Some of the larger agricultural merchants and agro-chemical firms have been very willing to co-operate in joint educational and training ventures. They usually have representatives calling regularly on farmers and are thus in a good position to promote courses and other educational programmes.

Industrial representatives are vital for advice on many aspects of updating programmes, notably promotion, cost, packaging, length, format and timing. In-depth market research, however, can throw up different needs, as those who represent rural industries are often the larger employers, with different ideas of what is required from those of the self-employed. Programmes must be customised and produced to suit the needs of the target group. For example, a high-powered conference at the National Agricultural Centre may be appropriate for 5-10% of rural employers, but a short course in a local pub or a home-based learning programme may be more appropriate for the 50% of farmers who employ no labour and cannot afford a day off.

COMMENTS AND FURTHER INFORMATION

FEU welcomes comments on this bulletin and the issues it raises. These should be addressed to FEU's rural economy consultant, John Cooke, 'Conacre', Hog End, Bloxham, Banbury, Oxfordshire OX15 4NE, tel. 0295-720420. Further copies of this bulletin, and others in the series, can be obtained from the Information Centre, Further Education Unit, 2 Orange Street, London WC2H 7WE, tel: 01-321 0433 ext. 256.

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